

Planning for children in school age care



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Contents

1. Introduction	5
Background	5
Purpose	5
2. Program and practice requirements	6
3. Planning and documentation	7
The way forward	8
4. Planning cycle	9
Stage 1: Collect information	10
Stage 2: Question, analyse and evaluate	11
Stage 3: Plan	12
Stage 4: Act and Do	12
Stage 5: Reflect	13
5. Conclusion	14
Where can I find more information?	14



1. Introduction

Background

In December 2009, all Australian governments agreed to a new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care as a means of ensuring that all Australian children, regardless of their location, get the best possible start in life through high-quality early childhood education and care and school age care services.

The objectives of the National Quality Framework are to:

- ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending education and care services
- improve the educational and developmental outcomes for children attending education and care services
- promote continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care services
- establish a system of national integration and shared responsibility between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth in the administration of the National Quality Framework
- improve public knowledge and access to information about the quality of education and care services
- reduce the regulatory and administrative burden for education and care services by enabling information to be shared between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth.

In Victoria, the Department of Education and Training is the regulatory authority responsible for administering the National Quality Framework. The National Quality Framework applies to family day care, long day care, school age care services and preschools (kindergartens) across Australia as of 1 January 2012. These services must meet the legislative requirements of the:

- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (National Law) available at: eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/NQFAct2010.pdf
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (National Regulations) available at: eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/NQFRegs2011.pdf
- National Quality Standard (Schedule 1 of the National Regulations)

These documents outline the requirements regarding the educational program delivered to children being educated and cared for by the service.

Purpose

This guide has been developed to support educators in school age care services to plan and document children's learning in a way that supports planning, developing and implementing the educational program and practice, and which meets the requirements of the National Law and National Regulations.

There are many ways to plan and document children's learning, and this resource provides ideas to consider in your service to ensure the planning cycle is completed in a meaningful way.

2. Educational program and practice requirements

The National Quality Framework focuses on outcomes for children. It requires all approved education and care services to deliver a program to every child being educated or cared for by the service. The program must be based on an approved learning framework and delivered in a manner according with an approved learning framework, which considers each child's developmental needs, interests and experiences.

The approved learning frameworks have been developed to guide educators in developing quality programs that support children's learning. For Victorian education and care services the declared approved learning frameworks are:

- *The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*
www.education.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/learning/veyldframework.pdf
- *My Time, Our Place: A Framework for School Age Children in Australia*
acecqa.gov.au/research-and-publications/
- *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*
acecqa.gov.au/research-and-publications/

In addition, educator's guides are available to support the approved learning frameworks, including resources to support the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework which are available at: education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/default.htm. The *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework and the Educators My Time, Our Place-Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care* which are both available at: acecqa.gov.au/resources-and-templates/

The National Law, the National Regulations and the National Quality Standard are the key legislative documents that establish the National Quality Framework.

An educational program must be delivered to all children being educated and cared for by the service (section 168 and regulation 73(1)). The program must be based on an approved learning framework and delivered in accordance with that framework. Regulation 73(2) requires that an educational program contributes to the following outcomes for each child.

Outcomes for children

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

Furthermore, the approved service provider must ensure that evaluations of each child's wellbeing, development and learning are documented (regulation 74(b)). In preparing the documentation, the approved provider must:

- consider the period of time the child is being educated and cared for by the service
- consider how the documentation will be used at the service, and
- ensure the documentation is readily understood by educators and parents.

My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care, My Time Our Place- : Refer to Figure 1, Elements, page 7. Each outcome is examined in detail in pages 8–11.

3. Planning and documentation

Planning for children’s wellbeing, development and learning is crucial for the provision of quality programs to children and their families in a school age care setting. This environment provides a variety of experiences and learning opportunities to support children’s learning and development. These experiences may be spontaneous or more formal; based inside or outside; during routines or special events; relaxed or more active.

Learning experiences are enhanced when educators take the time to reflect on children’s interests and needs and make plans to support them. At its best, this process is undertaken collaboratively with the children, families, educators and the wider school community.

My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia (2011, p. 5) is clear about the way that school age care settings contribute to children’s learning:

In school age care settings educators collaborate with children to provide play and leisure opportunities that are meaningful to children and support their wellbeing, learning and development. School age care settings pay attention to the needs and interests of individual children within a context that promotes collaboration and active citizenship. Children in school age care settings have choice and control over their learning as they collaborate with educators to extend their life skills and develop dispositions towards citizenship.

Being clear about how we plan for children’s learning and leisure does not mean that we eliminate the fun of school age care. The opposite is true. Planning can make the program fun, safe, inclusive of everyone and full of the sort of experiences children will look back on as some of the best days of their lives.

While there are no prescribed ways to undertake this important work and no one process that will enable educators to determine the ‘right’ amount of planning for children’s wellbeing, development and learning, it is possible to give educators guidelines about effective planning. The approved learning frameworks referred to in the previous section will further enhance the planning process. They serve to guide educators’ actions, and will prompt each team or service to think together about what works for them in their setting.



The way forward

The National Quality Standard (Regulations 55–56) requires all service providers to have a Quality Improvement Plan that contains a written **statement of philosophy** identifying the service’s and educators’ beliefs and outlining the principles under which the service operates.

This philosophy reflects the principles of the approved learning frameworks. It underpins the decisions, policies and daily practices of the service and assists in planning, implementing and evaluating quality experiences for children:

A statement of philosophy is a statement the approved provider of an education and care service must ensure is in place. It is designed to guide the operation of the service and must be available to the staff members of the service and parents of children attending the service. (*Glossary, Guide to the National Quality Standard, October 2011*).

The statement of philosophy will also guide a service in planning and developing the educational program and practice.

School age care educators can best plan for children’s wellbeing, development and learning when they follow a simple cycle in which they gather and analyse information about children; plan to respond to their needs and interests in meaningful ways; and then reflect on what has happened and where the plans might go next. While this planning cycle is similar to those used in other education and care services, it will look different in school age care settings.

There are a number of characteristics that make the planning process in school age care unique, although these may differ across services and would need to be considered when undertaking the planning cycle. These factors include:

- the part-time nature of children’s participation – some of whom attend infrequently
- school age children are able to contribute thoughtfully to the process
- the nature of the experience of school age care, with the focus on play and leisure opportunities that are meaningful to children.

The next section maps out a suggested planning cycle.



4. Planning cycle

The following suggestions for program development move through a planning cycle but take account of the unique nature of school age care within this cycle. Educators who are mindful of this cycle – and who ensure that each child’s wellbeing, development and learning are considered – will find that their practice supports the outcomes of the National Quality Standard. Figure 1 illustrates the planning cycle, based on the Cycle of Inquiry. The concentric circles feature the principles upon which a program is built:

- it is childcentred
- the context is families, culture, community and educators
- the content is based on the learning outcomes from *My Time, Our Place: A Framework for School Age Children in Australia* (or an approved learning framework)
- it is evidence based: built on a platform of data/ information, including evaluations, observations and parent interviews.

In recognition that planning is an ongoing process of continuous improvement and refinement, where stages overlap to a degree, we have mapped out a five-stage process based upon the cycle of inquiry:

1. Collect information (cycle of inquiry: ‘Observe and Review’ and ‘Question’)
2. Question, analyse and evaluate (cycle of inquiry: ‘Question’)
3. Plan (cycle of inquiry: ‘Plan’)
4. Act and Do (cycle of inquiry: ‘Act and Do’)
5. Stage 5: Reflect (cycle of inquiry: ‘Observe and Review’).

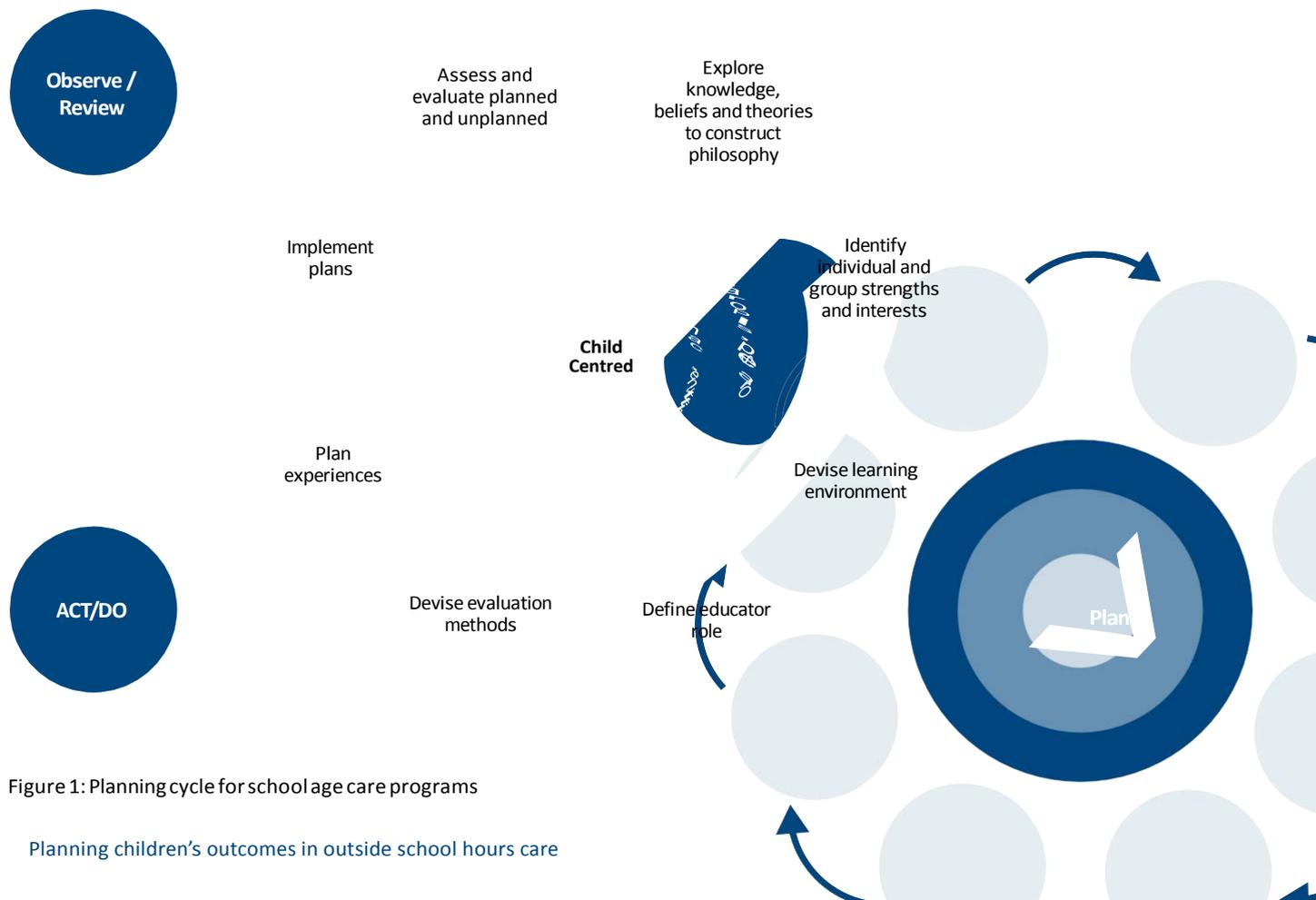


Figure 1: Planning cycle for school age care programs

Stage 1: Collect information

(Cycle of Inquiry: Observe and Review and Question)

Collecting information about children, families and the community helps educators plan effective programs that support wellbeing, development and learning of the program. This information gathering should be done collaboratively with the children and their families. Educators can use the approved frameworks, as well as ongoing reflection, to collect data that is meaningful to their setting.

What does this mean?

This entails collecting meaningful information about children, their families and communities to support program development. The information collected and the way it is collected should reflect the school age care setting and enable children to be active participants in the process.

What might it look like?

It includes observations of children, the enrolment form (e.g. adaptable form/sheet provided for children to complete at time of enrolment), photos, records of conversations with children, families and other professionals, notes from meetings with children, collected children's ideas and suggestions, children's work, children's enrolment/information forms and checklists.

How much should there be?

There is no set amount of documentation needed to be collected for each child. It is important to consider how children attend programs to determine how many records should be collected. Children who attend before and after school programs regularly will have more information. Obviously, far less information could be gleaned from children who attend only once a term, for example.

Information should, most importantly, be meaningful to educators, children and families. It should be sufficient to ensure educators are able to support each child's interests, developmental needs and effectively communicate a clear and accurate picture of the child.

Some ideas

1. Invite the children to put their suggestions in an ideas book made available throughout the program.
2. Invite the children to complete their own enrolment form with their likes and dislikes and their suggestions for programs.
3. Establish an OSHC advisory group, made up of volunteers from the children, and keep notes about their experiences of the program and their interests.
4. At regular intervals make note of how children are travelling against the five learning outcomes (the frequency will change depending on how often the children attend). This could be a process undertaken with the staff team, with children themselves and with families.
5. Make a graffiti wall for children and families to write up ideas, thoughts and suggestions.
6. Invite children to 'vote' on their favourite experiences, activities, or part of the program.
7. Survey the children by inviting older children to survey younger children.
8. Have children contribute to the collection of meaningful information by using technology, such as computer diaries, blogs, video logs, scrapbooks, photos and stories, etc.

Stage 2: Question, analyse and evaluate

(Cycle of Inquiry: Question)

What does this mean?

This element is about understanding the information collected about children, families and the community. It is a process of interpreting, analysing and evaluating so educators can learn about children's learning and development and the community in which the service operates.

What might it look like?

Analysis or evaluation can take many forms, for example by

- making links to children's wellbeing, development and learning in the five outcomes
- examining children's ideas and suggestions for themes and common threads
- looking at the popular experiences.

It is more a process of examining the information rather than using set documents or forms.

How much should there be?

As with the collection of information about children, there is no set amount of analysis or evaluation that must be undertaken. It is much more important to demonstrate that there is a process of analysing or evaluating the information collected. This can be done with children themselves as well as with families, and other professionals who might work with children. The planning element is strengthened when it is informed by an analysis or evaluation of the information collected.

Some ideas

1. Take a sample of the information you have collected about a particular element of the program to staff meetings. Discuss what it highlights about children's learning in the five outcomes or what children enjoy or dislike. Make a note of how you will respond.
2. Use a format that encourages you to write about children's progress in the five outcomes (one A4 page is sufficient) and at regular intervals (i.e. shorter time periods: maybe each term for children who attend regularly and longer for those who attend irregularly or infrequently). This will give you a sense of where children need support or extension.



Stage 3: Plan

(Cycle of Inquiry: Plan)

What does this mean?

This element is about designing experiences and environments to support children's wellbeing, development and learning. It involves planning in advance to ensure that children get the most from the experience and responding to their emerging ideas.

What might it look like?

The plan should capture a holistic approach to the curriculum (the whole program). While there are no prescribed methods or formats, the document needs to capture the plans made for children's wellbeing, development and learning in the five outcomes. It should be more than a list of activities and it should encompass ideas for inside and outside, routines and permanent experiences, as well as children's emerging ideas. It is important that the plan is made available to children and families.

How much should there be?

There must be a plan for whenever the service is in operation. This could mean that plans are developed for different timeframes; for example, monthly, per term or per program for vacation care. It is helpful to try several different format designs and experiment with the way they support the provision of an effective program.

Some ideas

1. Instead of making lists of experiences or activities, try to plan for other components of the program, such as planning for individuals and groups, routines, meal times, experiences, interactions, or the use of the indoor and outdoor environments
2. Plan in a big A3 book, using one page for the planned experience and the facing page to add ideas as the program develops.
3. Use a program format that allows room for setting goals for the program for each term or for each program in vacation care.
4. Make space for planning inside and outside experiences, routines and interactions between educators and children.
5. Make space for capturing children's emerging ideas and the things you plan to teach children about, for example how to make bread.

Stage 4: Act and Do

(Cycle of Inquiry: Act and Do)

What does this mean?

This is about using practices to support the program, for example, scaffolding learning, strengthening relationships, modifying the environment, and having rich conversations with children and their families.

What might it look like?

This element requires educators to understand the practices in the *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* and how they are used to support children's wellbeing, development and learning. It involves making sure that the whole educator team understands how the decisions made on curriculum/educational planning contribute to and support children's participation in the program.

Some ideas

1. It is important that educators take time to talk about the practices in the *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* and the practice principles in the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* and how they apply to their work with children and their families.
2. Identify practices or practice principles that apply to the plan to enable colleagues to better understand its goals.

Stage 5: Reflect

(Cycle of Inquiry: Observe and Reflect)

What does this mean?

This element is about evaluating children's wellbeing, development and learning linked to the Learning Outcomes and Practice Principles. It also involves using critical reflective practice to examine how the program includes every child.

What might it look like?

It is about establishing a process where educators think about how the program is developed and how all children and families are included.

How much should there be?

As with the collection of information about children, there is no set amount of analysing or evaluating. It is important, however, that there is a demonstrated process and that ideas are captured in writing.

Some ideas

1. Use an A3 visual diary (no lines) and place it in a central location with sticky notes and coloured pens. Invite staff to add their ideas, suggestions, questions and concerns. Take it to staff meetings and talk about what is written and how you will respond as a team.
2. Extend the idea of establishing an OSHC advisory group and invite the children, educators and families to think about how everyone is included in the program.
3. Use some of the ideas featured in collecting information, which promote children's voices, such as:
 - (a) make a graffiti wall for children and families to write up ideas, thoughts and suggestions
 - (b) invite children to 'vote' on their favourite experiences, activities, or part of the program
 - (c) survey the children, by inviting the older children to survey younger children.



5. Conclusion

Quality approaches to the planning for children’s wellbeing, development and learning in school age care comprise the following actions:

1. Focus on children’s strengths – what the child can do rather than what he or she cannot do.
2. Include groups of children as well as individuals and reflect on the collaborative ways that children learn.
3. Ensure that documentation is accessible and meaningful to families and children and provides a clear evaluation of children’s wellbeing, development and learning.
4. Focus on children’s interests and strengths as a way of extending their learning, but also as a way to support their areas of need.
5. Offer a combination of experiences based on children’s interests and planned opportunities that support learning and wellbeing.

Where can I find more information?

The following documents are available on the ACECQA website: www.acecqa.gov.au

Approved Learning Frameworks

My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care
Educators’ My Time, Our Place – Educators’ Guide to the Framework for School Age Care

Early Years Learning Framework-Being, Belonging and Becoming

Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework

National Quality Framework Documents

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Guide to the National Law and Regulations
Guide to the National Quality Framework
Guide to the National Quality Standard

The following documents are available on the Victorian website: www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/profresources.htm

Approved Learning Framework

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

Practice Guides and Evidence papers to support the Early Years Learning and Development Framework

